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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

[FWS-R5-FR-2017-N106; FF05F24400-167-FXFR13350500000; OMB Control Number 1018-0127]

Agency Information Collection Activities; Horseshoe Crab and Cooperative Fish Tagging Programs

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of Information Collection; request for comment.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, we, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) are proposing to renew an information collection with revisions.

DATES: Interested persons are invited to submit comments on or before [INSERT DATE 60 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE *FEDERAL REGISTER*].

ADDRESSES: Send your comments on the information collection request (ICR) by mail to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, MS: BPHC, 5275 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, VA 22041-3803 (mail); or by email to Info_Coll@fws.gov. Please reference OMB Control Number 1018-0127 in the subject line of your comments.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: To request additional information about this ICR, contact Madonna L. Baucum, Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, by email at Info_Coll@fws.gov, or by telephone at (703) 358-2503.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, we provide the general public and other Federal agencies with an opportunity to comment on new, proposed, revised, and continuing collections of information. This helps us assess the impact of our information collection requirements and minimize the

public's reporting burden. It also helps the public understand our information collection requirements and provide the requested data in the desired format.

We are soliciting comments on the proposed ICR that is described below. We are especially interested in public comment addressing the following issues: (1) is the collection necessary to the proper functions of the Service; (2) will this information be processed and used in a timely manner; (3) is the estimate of burden accurate; (4) how might the Service enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; and (5) how might the Service minimize the burden of this collection on the respondents, including through the use of information technology.

Comments that you submit in response to this notice are a matter of public record. We will include or summarize each comment in our request to OMB to approve this ICR. Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment - including your personal identifying information - may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Abstract: The Maryland Fish & Wildlife Conservation Office (MDFWCO) will collect information on fishes captured by the public. Tag information provided by the public will be used to estimate recreational and commercial harvest rates, estimate natural mortality rates, and evaluate migratory patterns, length and age frequencies, and effectiveness of current regulations.

Horseshoe crabs play a vital role commercially, biomedically, and ecologically along the Atlantic coast. Horseshoe crabs are commercially harvested and used as bait in eel and conch fisheries. Biomedical companies along the coast also collect and bleed horseshoe crabs at their facilities. *Limulus amebocyte lysate*, derived from crab blood, is

used by pharmaceutical companies to test sterility of products. Finally, migratory shorebirds also depend on the eggs of horseshoe crabs to refuel on their migrations from South America to the Arctic. One bird in particular, the rufa red knot (*Calidris canutus rufa*), feeds primarily on horseshoe crab eggs during its stopover. Effective January 12, 2015, the rufa red knot was listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (79 FR 73706; December 11, 2014).

In 1998, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), a management organization with representatives from each State on the Atlantic Coast, developed a horseshoe crab management plan. The ASMFC plan and its subsequent addenda established mandatory State-by-State harvest quotas, and created the 1,500-square-mile Carl N. Shuster, Jr., Horseshoe Crab Sanctuary off the mouth of Delaware Bay.

Restrictive measures have been taken in recent years, but populations are increasing slowly. Because horseshoe crabs do not breed until they are 9 years or older, it may take some time before the population measurably increases. Federal and State agencies, universities, and biomedical companies participate in a Horseshoe Crab Cooperative Tagging Program. The Service's MFWCO maintains the information collected under this program and uses it to evaluate migratory patterns, survival, and abundance of horseshoe crabs.

Agencies that tag and release the crabs complete FWS Form 3-2311 (Horseshoe Crab Tagging) and provide the Service with:

- Organization name.
- Contact person name.
- Tag number.
- Sex of crab.

- Prosomal width.
- Capture site, latitude, longitude, waterbody, State, and date.

Members of the public who recover tagged crabs provide the following information using FWS Form 3–2310 (Horseshoe Crab Recapture Report):

- Tag number.
- Whether or not tag was removed.
- Whether the tag was circular or square.
- Condition of crab.
- Date captured/found.
- Crab fate.
- Finder type.
- Capture method.
- Capture location.
- Reporter information.
- Comments.

At the request of the public participant reporting the tagged crab, we send data pertaining to the tagging program and tag and release information on the horseshoe crab that was found or captured.

We propose a revision to this existing collection of information to include four forms currently in use which are used by the Service:

- Form 3–2493, “American Shad Recapture Report”;
- Form 3–2494, “Snakehead Recapture Report”;
- Form 3–2495, “Striped Bass Recapture Report”; and,
- Form 3–2496, “Sturgeon Recapture Report.”

Fish will be tagged with an external tag containing a toll-free number that is

housed at MDFWCO. Members of the public reporting a tag will be asked a series of questions pertaining to the fish that they are referencing. This data will be used by fisheries managers throughout the east coast and mid-Atlantic region, depending on species.

Currently the species that are tagged are Striped Bass (*Morone saxatilis*), Atlantic (*Acipenser oxyrinchus*) and Shortnose Sturgeon (*Acipenser brevirostrum*), Northern Snakehead (*Channa argus*), and American Shad (*Alosa sapidissima*). Striped Bass are cooperatively managed by federal and state agencies through the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC). The ASMFC uses fish tag return data to conduct stock assessments for Striped Bass. The database and collection is housed within MDFWCO, while the tagging is conducted by state agencies participating in Striped Bass management. Without this data collection Striped Bass management would likely suffer from a lack of quality data.

Sturgeon are tagged by federal, state, and university biologists, and NGO's along the U.S. east coast and into Canada, and throughout the U.S. and Canada. Local populations of Atlantic sturgeon have been listed as either threatened or endangered since 2012 and shortnose populations since 1973. The information collected provides data on tag retention and sturgeon movement along the east coast. The data is also used to address some of the management and research needs identified by the ASMFC Amendment 1 to the Atlantic Sturgeon Fishery Management Plan.

Northern Snakehead is an invasive species found in many watersheds throughout the mid-Atlantic region. It has been firmly established in the Potomac River since at least 2004. Federal and state biologists within the Potomac River watershed have been tasked with managing the impacts of Northern Snakehead. Tagging of Northern Snakehead is used to learn more about the species so that control efforts can be better informed. Tagging is also used to estimate population sizes to monitor

fluctuations in population size. Recreational and commercial fishers reporting tags provide information on catch rates and migration patterns as well.

American Shad are tagged by the NY Department of Environmental Conservation (NYDEC) and they retain all fish tagging information. The public reports tags to MDFWCO, who provides information on tag returns to NYDEC. Tag return data are used to monitor migration and abundance of shad along the Atlantic Coast.

Data collected across these tagging programs is similar in nature, including: tag number, date of capture, waterbody of capture, capture method, fish length, fish weight, fish fate (whether released or killed), fisher type (i.e., commercial, recreational, etc.). In addition, if the tag reporter desires more information on their tagged fish or wants the modest reward that comes with reporting a tag, we ask their address so that we can mail them the information.

Title of Collection: Horseshoe Crab and Cooperative Fish Tagging Programs.

OMB Control Number: 1018–0127.

Form Number: FWS Forms 3–2310, 3–2311, and 3–2493 through 3–2496.

Type of Review: Revision of a currently approved collection.

Respondents/Affected Public: Respondents include Federal and State agencies, universities, and biomedical companies who conduct tagging and members of the general public provide recapture information.

Total Estimated Number of Annual Respondents: 1,987.

Total Estimated Number of Annual Responses: 3,656.

Estimated Completion Time per Response: Varies from 5 minutes to 95 hours, depending on activity.

Total Estimated Number of Annual Burden Hours: 2,682 (rounded).

Respondent's Obligation: Voluntary.

Frequency of Collection: Respondents will provide information on occasion,

upon tagging or upon encounter with a tagged crab or fish.

Total Estimated Annual Nonhour Burden Cost: None.

An agency may not conduct or sponsor and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

The authority for this action is the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. 3501 *et seq.*).

Dated: August 31, 2017

Signed: _____
Madonna L. Baucum,
Information Collection Clearance Officer, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
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